

MPEA – Standard V Case Study

Superintendent

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SMSU

“Ethics and Fiscal Responsibilities”

As a new superintendent in a small school district, you have spent the first few months just keeping your eyes open and making mental notes about how “things have always been done” by your predecessor. And it's been quite a learning experience for you. The former superintendent had been in the district for twenty-two years and had administered the school more like a family than a business. You often find people making phone calls from your office because, “Mr. Jones always did; it's more private in his office”, as well as getting into the storeroom in your office to “borrow” supplies.

You have dealt with these situations fairly well and for the most part you have begun to see a more professional atmosphere in the school. One area, however, still has you very concerned; the district's “loose” fiscal procedures. In this area, you don't know exactly what to do.

Questions concerning the budgetary processes and procedures occurred almost immediately after taking the job and after two months you have a laundry list the length of your arm about discrepancies in accounting, management and purchasing. Some of the things are minor, some major, and some potentially catastrophic. For instance in the past two months you have discovered that:

1. 10 to 15% of athletic gate receipts are routinely held back to “feed the kitty”, a sort of petty cash drawer that principals use to buy flowers for Secretary Day, buy treats for faculty meetings, and take care of “every day” occurrences.
2. Football camp fees, yearbook revenues, and other misc. incomes are often kept in the coach's or advisor's personal banking accounts so they can pay for expenses promptly. Left over monies are given to the school at the end of the year by personal check from the coach or advisor.
3. Teachers routinely use the school tax free status to make personal purchases. They have the school buy the product (usually electronics or computers) and then they reimburse the district. The teachers not only save on the taxes but also usually get a school discount.
4. Teachers make purchases for classroom materials without purchase orders and then are reimbursed when they present a bill to the school.
5. Secretaries routinely collect monies for a variety of purposes (pencil sales, instrument rental, etc.), count the monies, deposit the monies and make all entries of monies into their specified accounts and then write the checks out of those accounts without any authorization or cross-checks.

When you have asked personnel about the practices, the answers have been consistent. “This is the way it's done here. Mr. Jones let us do it this way to save time, save money, or (whatever)”. Even the school board is aware of these practices and in some ways is proud of them. After all one board member stated, “We can't afford to pay the salaries that other schools pay but we can offer a few “perks” and “user friendliness” that the bigger districts can't match”. Everyone seems comfortable with the situation, though the board does voice the hope that nobody ever takes advantage of the situation and they can avoid community controversy. (Which, for the past twenty-odd years, is exactly what Mr. Jones made sure didn't happen.)

Still, you feel uneasy and you have asked to address the Board of Education at the next board meeting in two weeks. You just aren't sure what you are going to say.

What should you do?

First consider these questions:

1. What legal issues need to be addressed immediately?
2. What ethical issues are embodied in this situation?
3. Can you afford to let business continue as usual?
4. Do the “conveniences” and “perks” justify the status quo continuing?
5. How does the board’s thinking affect your decision?
6. What potential problems do you see occurring if there are no changes?
7. Do you think acting on this situation might put your job in jeopardy?
8. Do you think not acting on this situation might put your job in jeopardy?
9. How do you believe the community would respond if they knew how fiscal issues were handled in the district?
10. What obligations do you have to act in this situation?

Now, develop recommendations including:

- A list of legal issues which might affect situation
- A list of ethical issues that might affect the situation.
- A list of the pluses and minuses of possible actions.

A plan of action including:

- An outline of the presentation you will make to the Board of Education.
- Legal and ethical bases for any action you might take.
- A timeline of actions you might consider taking after the board meeting.

ISLLC Standards:

Primary standard:

Standard five: **A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.**

Secondary Standard:

Standard three: **A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.**

Standard five skills, dispositions and performances:

Skills:

- various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics
- professional codes of ethics

Dispositions:

- bringing ethical principles to the decision-making process
- subordinating one's own interest to the good of the school community
- accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions
- development of a caring school community.

Performances:

- examines personal and professional values
- demonstrates a personal and professional code of ethics
- considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others
- treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect
- protects the rights and confidentiality of students and staff

Critical Needs Areas Addressed:

#5 Providing information, which will assist public school administrators and teachers in understanding the process of [site-based] decision making.

Notes to Instructor:

1. This case study is one that can be used to determine students' entry level skills in professional ethics, law or budgeting. It could be used as an exit exercise to a budgeting lesson. If so, you might want to have students apply specific legal or ethical frameworks that you have introduced.
2. Make sure the students reflect upon the superintendent's set of circumstances and, at least for a while, avoid reflecting on what "they would do". This will avoid the sometimes "holier than thou" mentality people have about their own behavior. Their action/inaction and the manner in which they act could cost them their job in the "real world". They should try to understand what that means to them personally and professionally.
3. After the initial product review and discussion is over, ask the students how they would have responded to the problem. If they would have acted differently than their recommendations to the superintendent, you might ask them why they feel they would act differently. This might be a good time to discuss the impact of concepts like political pressure, occupational survival, stress and other related topics on decision-making.
4. The activity should take around 60 minutes.

Extended learnings:

1. Have the students speculate what they would need to do if they chose to do nothing. What would they have to do unethically or illegally to maintain the status quo.
2. Have the student discuss what types of human relations skills would be needed to address the faculty and staff to amend the behaviors that have been used in the past?

URLs:

1. Centre for the Study of Values and Leadership - Centre is devoted to the support, promotion and dissemination of theory and research on values and leadership. Has a good list of resources on ethics. <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~pbegley/>
2. The Rural School and Community Trust – A non-profit that offers articles and suggestions on community building and numerous other related topics. <http://ruraledu.org/>
3. Success link – Includes a “best practices” section which addresses conflict resolution, school character development and other programs that might assist in this case. <http://www.successlink.org/>
4. FindLaw – A site that contains numerous links to case law at several judicial levels. <http://public.findlaw.com/>

Topics that students should be able to use or address:

- Ethical Frameworks
- Professionalism and Staff Relations
- Change Processes
- Human Relations
- Motivation
- School Climate
- Communications Skills
- Budget Practices and Policies

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:	Level One	Level Two	Level Three
Various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics professional codes of ethics	Sees situation only from pragmatic view – getting the job done without losing theirs.	Recognizes ethical issues but still uses the situation to accomplish organizational/personal goals	Recognizes ethical issues and acts in a way that preserves integrity of profession.
Displays Acceptable Dispositions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> bringing ethical principles to the decision-making process subordinating one's own interest to the good of the school community accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions 	Attitude and beliefs manifest a “Me first” tone.	Attitude and beliefs are slanted toward ethical interests though actions which may not reflect ethical treatment of others	Behaviors reflect an attitude and belief that confidentiality and the dignity of others is paramount in the budgeting process, regardless of potential consequences.
Examines personal and professional values	Fails to consider their own beliefs as they encounter the scenario solution	Considers their own beliefs and values as they encounter the scenario solution.	Scenario actions mirror the personal beliefs and values. There is no double standard.
Demonstrates a personal and professional code of ethics	Sees situation only from pragmatic view – getting the job done	Recognizes ethical issues but still uses the situation to accomplish organizational/personal goals	Recognizes ethical issues and acts in a way that preserves integrity of profession.
Considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others	Fails to consider the impact of their actions/inactions in the scenario solution	Considers the impact of their actions/inactions in the scenario solution but does not let the impact affect their behavior.	Considers the impact of their actions in the scenario solution and alters behavior to maintain ethical considerations.
Treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect	Acts in own self interest. Ignores the good of the people.	Acts for the good of the people but inserts qualifications or conditions.	Acts for the good of the people without qualifications or conditions.
Protects the rights and confidentiality of students and staff	Does not consider confidentiality in the scenario solution.	Considers confidentiality but exhibits behavior that makes confidentiality as conditional.	Considers confidentiality as an absolute right of the person and predicates actions upon this belief.